

# THE BOANERGES BOYS

## Luke 9:51-56

The Zebedee brothers, James and John, were used to getting their way. They came from a family which operated a fishing business—Zebedee and Sons—and tax records indicate that the owners of fishing businesses around the Sea of Galilee during Jesus' time were among the wealthier members of society. Most likely, the Zebedees had contacts in all the right places and knew how to use their influence to get things done. At one point they even tried to use their influence with Jesus to persuade him to make them his two top men when He set up his kingdom. So when they were traveling with Jesus through Samaria and came to a town which refused to welcome them, they asked Jesus if they could call down fire out of heaven to destroy the town. Jesus rebuked them for having a vengeful spirit and nicknamed them “Boanerges” which meant “sons of thunder.” It wasn't intended as a compliment.

The way of the Boanerges is the way of this world: people using power and influence to get their own way. James and John assumed that the kingdom Jesus had come to bring—the Kingdom of God—would go by the same rules as the kingdom of this world and they were just the men to help him manage it once it was up and running. They remind me of a plant manager I once met in a small town in Texas. He made no bones about the fact that he didn't like to be contradicted—especially by people who worked for him. When I asked him if he didn't think that his employees might be entitled to a second opinion, he said, *“Sure they are. In fact, if they want a second opinion after they've heard mine, I get up, leave my office, come back in and give them my opinion again.”* He was kidding with the truth but he wasn't kidding about the fact that he was used to having his own way and being top dog made it easy. His goal was the Boanerges' goal. “Live and let live” might be a fine motto for others, but as for him, it was his way or the highway.

What a contrast there is between the Boanerges' way and Jesus' way! James and John wanted to destroy the town that had rejected them while

Jesus simply left it behind and, “...*resolutely set out for Jerusalem.*” “Resolutely” because he knew what awaited him there. Jerusalem—His destination and His destiny—meant humiliation, suffering and death. While the Boanerges Boys were dreaming of power and glory and threatening to hurl thunderbolts at anyone who got in their way, Jesus was setting out to suffer and die for people who hated him and were plotting to kill him. The Boanerges’ goal was to win at all costs; Jesus’ goal was to submit to God’s will. And truth be told, we prefer the Boanerges’ goal to Jesus’ goal because we want to have our own way too. We don’t have to look very far to find symptoms of this in our lives: we can begin with our jobs and our families.

As far as our jobs are concerned, one thing I learned in fifteen years of human resource management was that almost every conflict that arises in the workplace has something to do with control—who has it and who doesn’t. The Bible says: “*Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves.*” (Rom 13:1-2) What an alien thought! That authority—political authority, workplace authority, parental authority, church authority—all have been instituted by God. But we don’t buy it for a minute whether the Bible says it or not because we know better. We think: “*How that idiot got his job I’ll never know, but I could sure do it better than he does. If they’d only let ME run this place....*” Ever since the Garden of Eden we have struggled with authority. We chafe under it and we don’t use it very well when we have it.

We have the same problem in our own families. In dealing with troubled marriages it has been my experience that the core issue in almost every dispute boils down to a matter of who is going to get their way—in other words, who is in control. It rarely occurs to either person to follow Paul’s advice to, “*Submit to each other out of reverence for Christ,*” because each partner is convinced that they are right and their partner is wrong. (Ephesians 5:21) Maybe we ought to try submitting to one another out of

reverence for Christ *just once* and let God work things out. I mean, insisting on our own way hasn't exactly been a crowning success, has it?

Then there's the relationships we have with our parents and our children. Parental authority is the main thing that sticks in our craw when we reach adolescence, and the last thing we want to give up when our kids reach adolescence. In both cases we want to have our own way—to have control. In fact, truth be known, control is probably the number one thing we want in our lives—control over our situations, control over our marriages, control over our careers, control over our lives. What a contrast to Jesus, who valued obedience to God more than he did control over his own life. Who “...*did not consider equality with God something to be clung to, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant...[he] humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross.*” (*Philippians 2:6-8*) We seek glory for ourselves and power over others; Jesus gave glory to God and died for others. God's ways are not our ways; they seem foolish to us. But the foolishness of God is higher than the wisdom of man. Jesus accomplished more through submission than the Boanerges could ever have accomplished by raw power.

The Boanerges wanted to call down fire out of heaven to destroy those who had rejected them. On the Day of Pentecost Jesus called down fire out of heaven to save those who had rejected him. He sent the fire of the Holy Spirit into the hearts of His disciples to kindle a faith that would break out and transform the world. Faith that would turn cowards who had deserted him in His hour of need—including the Boanerges Boys—into some of the bravest men the world has ever known. Men who had the courage to take up their crosses and follow Jesus in his “foolishness.” Rather than unleashing thunderbolts of destruction, Jesus unleashed a firestorm of salvation--fulfilling Moses' prophecy that, “...*the Lord your God is a consuming fire.*” (*Deuteronomy 4:24*) What James and John failed to understand—and we typically fail to understand—is that our real enemies are not the people who mistreat us: our real enemies are sin and death which destroy us. And these are the enemies which God sends His consuming fire to consume. Our way—the Boanerges' way—is weakness disguised as power. Jesus' way is power disguised as weakness.

Powerful people who win at the game of life appeal to us. The swaggering athlete who is “bad as he wants to be.” The gifted boxer who boasts that he is the greatest. The business mogul who claws his way to the top. People like that personify what we think of as power. Power is a football team battering its way down the field. Power is hitting a three-hundred yard drive. Power is the human will triumphing over any obstacle that gets in its way, no matter how much collateral damage it may leave in its wake. The Boanerges Boys coveted that kind of power: they aspired to be the chief operating officer and chief financial officer of a multinational Christian corporation with Jesus as the CEO. That’s what they thought power was all about that’s what we think power is all about. But they and we are wrong. That kind of power is a sham—it’s all smoke and mirrors and in the end it comes to nothing. True power comes only from God and it is made perfect in weakness, not strength. As the song goes, “*Your most awesome work was done through the frailty of Your Son.*” (*El Shaddai*). When we face up to the fact that we are lowly and meek and poor in spirit, and desperately need what God alone can supply, then we are ready to become channels of God’s power. When we are ready to let God’s plan for our lives replace our own and devote ourselves to what He considers important rather than what we consider important—God can use us to accomplish great things.

When the prophet Elijah was being pursued by Jezebel’s soldiers he crawled into a cave on the side of a mountain and hid there in despair. God came to him and said, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” He told God he had hit bottom and had no hope left. God said, “Come out here Elijah: I want to show you something.” [Read 1 Kings 19:11b-13]

God’s way is different than our ways. God’s way is THE way, the truth and the life—Jesus Christ, whose suffering and death on the cross unleashed power into this world which is beyond human imagination. The power to forgive those who have sinned against us. The power to love our neighbor more than ourselves. The power to deny ourselves and take up our crosses and follow Jesus. The power to trust God for the strength and courage to witness to our faith in a hostile world. Power that can flow through us and change the world. It doesn’t come in the form of thunder or

wind or lightning or earthquakes but through the gentle breeze of Christian love. And that is the Gospel truth. Amen.